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NC&S Online Foundation Knowledge Course D14

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Session 4: Corbett Gold/Blue Teams

Due: The primary post is due on NLT Monday at 2359 and the secondary posts are due NLT Wednesday at 2359.

Prompts

1. Gold Team

- a. Please answer the following question: *Explain the characteristics and requirements of a “limited war,” as envisioned by Corbett. Is this still relevant during an age of Great Power competition?*
- b. Your answer should be **350-500** words in length. Begin your initial post with **"GOLD POST:"** Additionally, you are required to **respond to at least two of the Blue Team DBF answers**. Your responses should be a **minimum of 100 words** in length.

2. Blue Team

- a. Please answer the following question: *How does Corbett’s conceptualization of sea power and its role in war differ from Mahan’s? Are there similarities?*

- b. Your answer should be 350-500 words in length. Begin your initial post with "BLUE POST:" Additionally, you are required to respond to at least two of the Gold Team DBF answers. Your responses should be a minimum of 100 words in length.

Gold Answer

GOLD POST:

Julian Corbett's vision of a limited war starts with his proposition that war is a continuation of policy by other means. This fundamental principle underlies his entire framework. For Corbett, the purpose of limited war is not the extinction of the enemy but the achievement of an identified, political aim through limited force (Corbett, *Some Principles*, 17). Limited war is determined by what the state seeks to achieve, how much it is willing to commit, and where it can gain an advantage, most notably by wielding maritime power.

Corbett's theory of limited war plays out in four major strategies: economic, naval, land, and diplomatic, which progress through three phases. Broadly speaking, the phases start with capturing a territorial object, consolidating dominance, and then applying general pressure to coerce a negotiated settlement (McCranie, *Foundations*, Chapter 13).

Corbett describes several characteristics that make limited war different. First, limited wars seek limited objectives. These are usually of the regional or political variety: protecting an ally, disrupting enemy plans, or changing spheres of influence. The aim is not the overthrow of the adversary but the safeguarding or promotion of interests. Success

depends on avoiding escalation and staying within the bounds of what the political objective requires (Corbett, *Some Principles*, 18).

Another feature is the employment of a “disposal force,” rather than full national mobilization. Britain, a maritime power, often used small but flexible expeditionary forces to harass its enemies without committing to extensive continental wars. Corbett’s treatment of the Peninsular War shows that success was possible when such a contingent had a clear and limited function, secure access to the sea, and operational independence (Corbett, *Some Principles*, 65). This integrated maritime method of warfare combined both sea control and selective land power to ensure that the force remained both agile and politically sustainable.

Corbett defines maritime strategy slightly different from naval strategy. Naval strategy is focused on fleet actions. Conversely, maritime strategy emphasizes joint land and sea forces working together to further national policy and safeguard maritime commerce through sea control. It enables states to act without committing to unlimited war. This strategic flexibility, inherent to maritime approaches, is key to the utility of limited war.

Corbett’s perspective resonates deeply in today’s Great Power competition. For instance, China’s assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific creates strategic dilemmas for the United States that require limited responses. Freedom of navigation operations, deterrence patrols, and partnership-building echo Corbett’s tenets of using maritime superiority to shape the environment without inviting full-scale war. The political objectives are limited, the means are restrained, and the risk of escalation is carefully controlled.

Corbett's model continues to hold significance because it emphasizes political control, economic strategy, and maritime mobility. In a time of nuclear deterrence, world trade, and regional crises, limited war is not just possible but also desirable. His work establishes a model for competing without crossing the line into disaster.

Blue Response #1

Really solid post. You did a great job explaining how Corbett and Mahan differ, particularly regarding decisive battle and the use of land power. My takeaway was your comment about Corbett and limited war. He undoubtedly views limited objectives as more in line with Britain's strengths, but it's also about avoiding the escalation of total war. Mahan's focus on economic pressure via sea control is indeed powerful, but Corbett adds an important additional layer with an emphasis on joint operations and political objectives. Both regarded sea control as critical, but employed it very differently. Overall, your post captured the differences and similarities and made the theory easy to follow.

Blue Response #2

Nice post! You provided a clear, structured point-for-point comparison that outlines the strengths and differences of both theorists. What is needed to add some nuance is Corbett's reaction to decisive battle was not completely dismissal. He saw its worth but felt it ought to be pursued in service of a larger political purpose rather than be a means to itself. You are spot on to get Corbett's wider lens. The case for joint land, sea and policy capabilities is especially strong for

maritime powers such as Britain. While Mahan emphasized battle and fleet strength, Corbett's flexibility may have more significance today in complex and limited wars.